

From Melting Pot to Mosaic

Donning the same plaid skirt, the short girl goes to class and the tall girl goes to the principal.
Natural redhead stays in school and dyed blue hair gets suspended.
Curling iron is professional, but coiled Black hair is unacceptable.

From banned bra straps to short skirts, many students believe dress codes lean towards limiting feminine clothes and how they are worn. Established in 1969, dress codes were created so the school environment is more conducive towards learning in an attempt to eliminate any distractions. It's true dress codes are important for maintaining a learning environment, but for decades, dress codes have created a hostile environment, pitting adults against students.

The latest dress code issue is discrimination against different ethnicities and natural hairstyles.

Black students are more likely to be suspended due to dress code violations, specifically due to their hair, than their White peers. This discrimination towards Black students comes from a lack of understanding of Black culture.

While some clothes need to be banned for schools to fulfill the obligation they have to create a learning environment, discrimination of hair to certain ethnic styles go beyond the *distraction* they claim.

Throughout Black [history](#), hair has been an extremely important part of culture and Black identity.

Some of the most well known black hairstyles were first shown in Ancient Egypt and braids of Western African. During the Civil Rights Movement, people were encouraged to embrace their hair. Although this was met with backlash, natural hair was seen as liberation and a way of taking pride in who you are.

The only conclusion that we can draw from the absurd discrimination against Black hair is that it has nothing to do with hair. Rather, it is because of deep-seated racism that has long plagued The United States as well as the rest of the world.

Sophomore Stephanie Faggett, proud of her Black heritage, says that Black hairstyles are important because they are made specifically for textures unique to Black people.

Stephanie explains that discriminating against these hairstyles is hypocritical. "The ponytails, braids, and short haircuts white kids wear are never discriminated against. It's seen as normal. With Black people it's the exact same thing. Just a hairstyle to wear out of the house that's efficient."

While Stephanie has not been told her hair isn't appropriate at school, she does say that there is an inevitable shock on many people's faces when seeing a new hairstyle. Stephanie also warns against touching her hair which Stephanie says is a "big NO." Stephanie currently sports short hair.

Although not as well known as cases in Texas and New Jersey, Colorado has had its fair share of discrimination against natural hair in school. This discrimination is a combination of "dress code violations," student to student mockery, and being told to change hair to be "more professional."

In 2020, Colorado became one of seven states that passed the “[CROWN Act of 2020](#)” which stands for “Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair.” This law prohibits the discrimination of Black hairstyles in the school and work environment.

To be more Culturally aware, acts like the CROWN Act are necessary to stand up against discrimination.

Dress codes can squash individual identity, gender expression, and cultural diversity. The dress code is an instrument that inhibits embracing multicultural awareness. Wording matters and poor wording can lead to controversy and inequality.

Although Multicultural Awareness needs laws like the CROWN act, awareness is also a personal endeavor and everyone should start by understanding others to have equality.

Coexistence

Multicultural awareness is the understanding and appreciation of multiple cultures. Multiculturalism is defined as going “deeper than diversity by focusing on inclusiveness, understanding, and respect, and by looking at unequal power in society.” Often we see only what is right in front of us. We forget to see the world outside of America and the rich cultures that fill the globe. Cultural awareness does not only benefit us as individuals, but benefits everyone else, providing an important foundation for diversity.

When showing a Black Lives Matter video in class, Cheyenne Mountain Social Studies teacher Mr. Lawson describes he can see some students bristle in response, many of which occasionally wore MAGA hats weeks earlier during remote learning. He continues to play the video to give students acknowledgement of the movement.

“This year showed me more than in all my 25 years of teaching is the lack of discussion and debate between people when it comes to politics. People on both sides of the political spectrum feel that their opinion is right and yours is wrong. Where did the spirit of being open minded and listening to alternative opinions go?”

Citizens in America are surrounded by constant school shootings. Mr. Lawson explains this cycle of loss, grief, and repeat makes people dull, much like police brutality. Being more culturally aware and acknowledging the lives outside of your own would make the world a better and safer place for everyone.

Mr. Lawson says that while he does know some students hold racial, gender, and sexual orientation bias, schools do prepare students well in terms of awareness. Showing videos, teaching about movements, and clubs like Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) encourage acceptance of differences.

Mr. Lawson said while diversity covers the differences between people, multiculturalism is also awareness and understanding of other cultures.

Individuals who are multiculturally aware are, “citizens of the world” and more accepting.

Mr. Lawson advises students to experience cultures to fully acknowledge them. “Be authentic; be in it,” Lawson conveys.

Humbleness and realizing that one is “not the smartest person in the room” are two of the most important qualities Mr. Lawson believes anyone can hold.

Author and UCCS Professor of Sociology and Director of Women's Studies Dr. [Abby Ferber](#) says that while celebrating diversity, or multicultural awareness, is extremely important, so is equity, which recognizes that everyone starts at different places.

“Everyone does not have the same ability to succeed in the U.S. society. Some of us are given a hand up, and others face greater obstacles to their success.” Dr. Ferber voices that, “Equity directs our attention to racism, discrimination, and other -isms that are a result of power imbalances in our nation.”

Dr. Ferber notes that multicultural awareness is extraordinarily important in our diverse, global community, and our lack of awareness hinders our success. Dr. Ferber understands that while someone is learning, they will make mistakes, but this is no reason to stop trying.

“Everyone will make mistakes and offend others as we continue our life-long journey. I try to embrace cultural humility and accept that I will make mistakes, and hopefully other people will give me the gift of letting me know when I do, so I can learn and grow. There is no reason for shame or guilt, only openness to learning.”

Dr. Stephany Rose Spaulding, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at UCCS as well as an [author](#) encourages everyone, regardless of race, to practice multicultural awareness as it enriches all lives. Dr. Spaulding admits that this isn’t easy, and it will take intention and practice to achieve awareness.

Dr. Spaulding defines the difference between diversity and multiculturalism. She says that diversity is people’s differences, and multicultural awareness is the “consciousness about various cultures of the world.”

Dr. Spaulding, “Living mindfully in relationships with others and their cultural needs, as well as practices, helps us shape a more inclusive society.”

Superintendent Dr. Walt Cooper wishes he had understood implicit bias when he was younger. He regrets that he did not start learning about diversity when he first started working in education rather than starting to learn it at the age of 58.

“Had I had that training when I was 28 and just starting out as a school teacher, I would have been so much better at teaching and everything I did over those 30 years without a doubt.”

Dr. Walt Cooper and the Cheyenne staff have attended several diversity training courses.

“The intense week was great training, especially for those of us who have spent much of our lives in non-diverse settings.”

He admits that he, “always thought that I was appreciating people appropriately, that my language was appropriate when I was speaking to folks that were different than me and I never felt like I was judging people, but what I learned was my actions were speaking otherwise, and had I not gone through Diversity University, I would have never been continuous of that.”

According to Dr. Cooper, diversity is important because schools are a “people business”, and understanding diversity better helps all students create a safe, equitable, and more accepting educational environment.

To Sophomore Alexandra Ardashnikova, the importance of cultural awareness is, “to remind people that we are different, but that doesn’t mean we are any less deserving of equality and respect.”

Alexandra is Russian-American. She says that despite the teasing she has received due to the negative reputation Russians have, her culture is something she is incredibly proud of.

Alexandra notes that people are rude when they don't understand others. Several people have shrunk away from her mom as soon as they heard her Russian accent because they didn't know the kind and strong woman she really is.

Alexandra encourages people to be curious and ask respectful questions about culture to achieve better understanding of others.

Alexandra feels she is a stronger and better person because of her culture and the people within it.

At school, Alexandra often answers the phone in Russian. Aside from the occasional stares and unnecessary comments using Russian stereotypes, Alexandra feels that the students tend to be good at minding their own business, however she does think with improved cultural understanding, Cheyenne students could be better classmates.

Multicultural Awareness benefits everyone. Diversity increases creativity and has been shown to make for a better economy. Being aware of others' cultures and learning about people outside of where you live or what you are surrounded by will greatly impact your life.

When you care about other cultures, it opens the possibility of meeting new people as well as trying new things.

Multicultural Awareness isn't something you can just say you have, you have to understand others, get out and experience the world and make friends with people who aren't anything like you.

When you are more culturally aware, people who are different and from marginalized groups will feel more welcome and change the world for the better.

Multicultural awareness can open many different doors and bring you different experiences, which is one of the most important and valuable parts of life, while simultaneously helping the rest of the world.